

FIREBREAK (394)

STANDARD

Definition: A strip of bare land or fire-retarding vegetation.

Purpose: To protect soil, water and plant resources by reducing or preventing damage from fire.

Condition Where Practice Applies: On areas where damaging fires are likely or where fire may be prescribed as a cultural or protective measure.

SPECIFICATIONS

Woodland Firebreaks

Firebreaks existing in woodland are usually developed as roads or trails to provide quick access for fire control. Following are minimum construction and maintenance specifications: 1/

1. Keep grades below 15 percent wherever possible and build with width at least 8 feet wide if designed for vehicles; 4 to 6 feet wide for foot trail. 2/
2. Keep the road out of stream channels and leave filter strips between disturbed areas and water courses.
3. Follow ridge tops where grades can be maintained and drainage provided.
4. Provide for water control. 2/
5. Inspect annually before each statutory fire season and remove fallen trees and other debris.
6. WILDLIFE - Wildlife values of roads and trails used as firebreaks can be improved by clearing strips 20 to 30 feet wide on both sides of the firebreak. 3/

1/ Roads or lanes left unplanted through areas planted to trees (including strip mine spoil) are not reportable as firebreaks unless they are specifically designed, constructed and maintained for this purpose as part of a farm conservation plan. See Tree Planting Standard (612), Section C 5A.

2/ See West Virginia Field Standard and Specification for Forest Land Erosion Control Systems (408) for additional information on woods roads.

3/ West Virginia Standard and Specification for Field Border (386).

Brushed out firebreaks may be needed to supplement access roads or trails in areas of high fire hazard. Location, pattern, and frequency need to be determined on site. Minimum specifications include clearing a lane at least 6 feet wide with a 2-foot wide pathway in the middle cleared of all inflammable material down to mineral soil.

Open Land or Plantation Firebreaks

Firebreaks in plantations are single purpose lanes constructed and maintained as follows:

1. Use on Class I, II, III and some Class IV land. Disk or plow strips at least 12 feet wide. On sloping land above 5 percent locate approximately on the contour.
2. Locate strips along public roads and at intervals through the plantation. Frequency of breaks through the plantation will depend upon value of the crop, degree of hazard and size and shape of plantation.
3. After initial establishment by plowing or disking, disk annually before fall statutory fire season to control vegetation on the breaks and to expose at least 50 percent mineral soil.

Tall fescue or crownvetch are suitable for maintaining cover on field firebreaks where erosion control is necessary and where the areas will be disked annually in late summer.

Planning considerations for water quantity and quality

Quantity

1. Effects on the components of the water budget.

Quality

1. Effects on erosion and the movement of sediment and soluble and sediment-attached substances that would be carried by runoff.
2. Effects on the movement of dissolved substances to ground water.